

May 10, 1999

The Honorable Slade Gorton
United States Senator
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Gorton:

We met with you last October to discuss the future of salmon hatcheries in Washington State. A major concern was that natural stocks of chinook and coho are depleted and unable to support fisheries for a decade or more, so the continued existence of fisheries must depend upon hatchery fish. However, hatcheries have been accused of contributing to the problems of the natural fish, which are now listed under the Endangered Species Act and require protection. You directed us to examine the potentials for using hatcheries to support fisheries while simultaneously aiding, and not hindering, recovery of natural stocks.

Enclosed you will find a document, *The Reform of Salmon and Steelhead Hatcheries in Puget Sound and Coastal Washington to Recover Natural Stocks while Providing Fisheries*, which describes a process we believe can accomplish the desired objectives. Fundamentally, it requires that goals be established for each hatchery relating to natural stock recovery or fishery augmentation, that these programs be scientifically founded and evaluated, that independent scientists interact with agency scientists to provide direction and operational guidelines, and that the system as a whole be audited for effectiveness.

Our proposal has been reviewed by other scientists and personnel from the fish agencies and managers in the area involved. We wanted input about major concerns so we could either change our document or prepare for eventual response, and we wanted hatchery policy makers to be familiar with our efforts. We received many comments, none of them in our judgment indicating either fatal flaws or even major differences. There were abundant editorial suggestions, but our concerns focussed on technical issues rather than style.

As you know, our group is diverse with individuals chosen because of knowledge about hatcheries, whose employers have different goals and histories of discord. Because we were acting without agency directive, there was initially a question about whether these individuals would interact supportively. Apprehension quickly disappeared, and the group worked intensely to produce a consensus document. In retrospect, the group showed an astonishing enthusiasm for two reasons: we were all convinced that the objectives could and should be accomplished, and your clear statement of support gave us the unusual feeling that, properly done, they would be accomplished.

We conclude that reforming hatcheries can have a major effect in solving our salmon problems at a cost that is small relative to other components such as environmental improvements, with results expected in a few years rather than decades. A key concept was identifying the fundamental changes needed to allow application now rather than years in the future. We expect the usual processes under the ESA would ultimately reach conclusions similar to ours, with a lapse of years that would prove very costly.

The team greatly appreciates this opportunity, and we will stand by to assist in any way we can.

Respectfully yours,

Peter K. Bergman, for:

Gorton Science Advisory Team

Peter Bergman, Ph.D, Northwest Marine Technology

Lee Blankenship, Wash. Dept. Fish & Wildlife

Donald Campton, Ph.D, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Svc.

Frank Haw, Northwest Marine technology

Conrad Mahnken, Ph.D, National Marine Fish. Svc.

Steve Phelps, Wash. Dept. Fish & Wildlife

Terry Wright, NW Indian Fish. Comm.

CC: Team